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FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 001030

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/16
TAGS: PGOV PREL INRB SR
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH NEW DPM
DULIC-MARKOVIC

Classified by Ambassador Michael C. Polt,
reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador's June 23 meeting with newly-appointed Deputy PM Ivana Dulic-Markovic revealed the new DPM as a deeply idealistic technocrat eager for positive change but uncertain of how to use her new position to effect it. The Ambassador encouraged Dulic-Markovic to speak her conscience to try to energize a population poorly served by its leadership in recent months. We expect Dulic-Markovic to be extremely receptive to our policy priorities, and we will encourage her to use her bully pulpit to speak out on behalf of Serbs who want to move forward. End Summary.

¶2. (c) Newly-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Ivana Dulic-Markovic invited the Ambassador to her office June 23 to exchange views on hot button policy issues and to seek the Ambassador's input into how she could help move the pro-reform agenda forward. She informed the Ambassador she will maintain the portfolios held by her predecessor, including EU integration, serving on the Kosovo negotiating team, and economic issues.

¶3. (c) Dulic-Markovic said she is firmly committed to Serbia's future in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community, but she sees "two Serbias" existing side by side - a (largely silent) majority, which wants to see Serbia progress, and a strong, vocal minority that is eager to side with the Radicals. She knows, she added, that the majority of Serbs are disappointed with their government, and she believes it is necessary to energize them by addressing core concerns like creating economic opportunities and strengthening judicial reform. To this end, she said, she and her G-17 Plus party leaders are formulating a road map of priorities for Serbia, including operational steps, to present to Tadic and Kostunica.

¶4. (c) Dulic-Markovic expressed dismay over Kostunica's recent remarks to the Ambassador and in the press that attempted to shift blame for his recent failures onto the international community. She surmised that the PM may be looking for a "way out" of his current difficult political situation through nationalist retrenching. The Ambassador urged her to speak with Kostunica about his upcoming trip to Washington to meet the Secretary, expressing his disappointment with the PM's refusal to meet

jointly with Tadic. The Ambassador emphasized that Kostunica will need to present the Secretary constructive ideas about the future,

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and not repeat well-worn legalistic arguments about Kosovo and Serb victimhood. Dulic-Markovic promised to speak with him, but cautioned she was leery of pushing him too hard, as she fears he is increasingly willing to side with the Radical (SRS) Party.

¶5. (c) On Kosovo, Dulic-Markovic recognized the inevitability of independence by the end of the year. She agreed that it would be difficult to explain the outcome to the Serbian people if the government continued to maintain its firm stance against independence. She thought the government's current planning looks to be to hold elections in the spring, in the hopes they can use elections to forestall a status decision on Kosovo until after elections are held. The Ambassador reiterated that a status decision was likely by the end of the year, and the international community would not allow Serbian internal politics to drive the timetable. Dulic-Markovic said she is prepared to call elections anytime, but said her influence on the process was extremely limited due to the weakness inherent in the position. The Ambassador encouraged her to use her "bully pulpit" to speak her mind on important issues of Serbia's future, and offered to assist her efforts wherever possible.

¶6. (c) COMMENT: Dulic-Markovic is uncertain in her new role, acknowledging that her position in the government is a relatively marginal one.

Nevertheless, she is a committed reformer and idealist, and has never in the past pulled back from speaking her mind - most famously when, as AGMIN, she complained that Milosevic's SPS had frittered away opportunities to focus on economic integration by transporting Albanian corpses instead of Serbian produce exports in its refrigerator trucks. She recognizes her political career may be short, and expressed willingness to take risks for the sake of creating improvements on the ground here. We will continue to support her efforts, and encourage her to give some voice to that silent majority of Serbs who want to move forward.

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